



# Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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## Press Statement

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### CAP calls for laws to eliminate lead in paints

The World Health Organization (WHO) has recognized October 21-27 2018 as *International Lead Poisoning Prevention Week* (ILPPW) and its main concern is the role of lead exposure in the development of intellectual disability in children. This year WHO is calling on governments, academia, industry and civil society to come out with specific laws to eliminate lead in paint.

According to a United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) report, as of early 2016, seventy (70 or 36%) of 196 countries worldwide have established legally binding limits on lead in paint.

Where Malaysia is concerned, there is no regulation limiting the amount of lead in paint for household and decorative use.

Since 1992, CAP has been calling on the government for laws to eliminate lead in paints. In a test conducted in 1992 we found 7 out of 9 enamel paints contained lead above 600 parts per million. The highest amount of lead found in that study was 11,700 ppm.

In 2016, CAP made another call to the government to set a standard for lead in paint as we found more than 60% of the samples tested contained exceedingly high lead levels. More than two years has passed since then but the Malaysian authorities have not come out with laws on lead in paints.

In another earlier study of lead content in paints in Malaysia done between 2004-2007, 72 enamel paints were analysed for total lead content. Results from this study similarly showed high lead levels.

The World Health Organization (WHO) calls lead paint “a major flashpoint” for potential lead poisoning in children and says that “since the phase-out of leaded petrol, lead in paint is one of the largest sources of exposure to lead in children.”

Children are exposed to lead when painted surfaces deteriorate over time and lead is released into the air contaminating household dust and soils. Children, up to 6 years old, who engage in normal hand-to-mouth behaviours are most at risk. Their intelligence and mental development may be affected by exposure to lead dust and soil.

Lead is a cumulative toxicant that affects multiple body systems. It is particularly hazardous to young children, pregnant woman and all those who are exposed to it. Effects of exposure include learning disabilities, increased risk of antisocial behaviour, reduced fertility and increased risk of renal and cardiovascular disease later in life.

There is no known safe level of lead exposure. Lead is a serious contributor to environmental pollution that accounts for a quarter of the global burden of disease.

Health impacts of lead cause significant economic costs to countries. A recent study found significant economic impacts of childhood lead exposure on national economies in all low- and middle-income countries. The study correlated reduced IQ to reductions in lifetime economic productivity. It is estimated that the annual economic loss in Malaysia to be \$11.8 billion, or 2.63 % of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Hence UN Environment (United Nations Environment Programme) has called on all countries, sectors and stakeholders to work together to achieve a positive legacy through the phase-out of lead paint.

The health impacts of lead exposure on young children's brains are lifelong, irreversible and untreatable. Lead gets into the gastrointestinal tract when children chew on objects such as toys, furniture or other articles painted with lead paint. Continued use of lead paint is a primary source of childhood lead exposure. Urgent measures need to be taken to reduce critical sources of lead exposure to young children.

In view of the dangers of lead CAP calls on the authorities to:

- > promulgate laws to eliminate lead in paints
- > ban lead in products
- > test and ban products that have been found to contain high levels of lead
- > run educational campaigns to create awareness on the dangers of lead.

Without a ban, Malaysia will be a dumping ground for products with high levels of lead that have been rejected by other countries.

As lead has a strong impact on children, immediate action needs to be taken to safeguard our future generation.

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